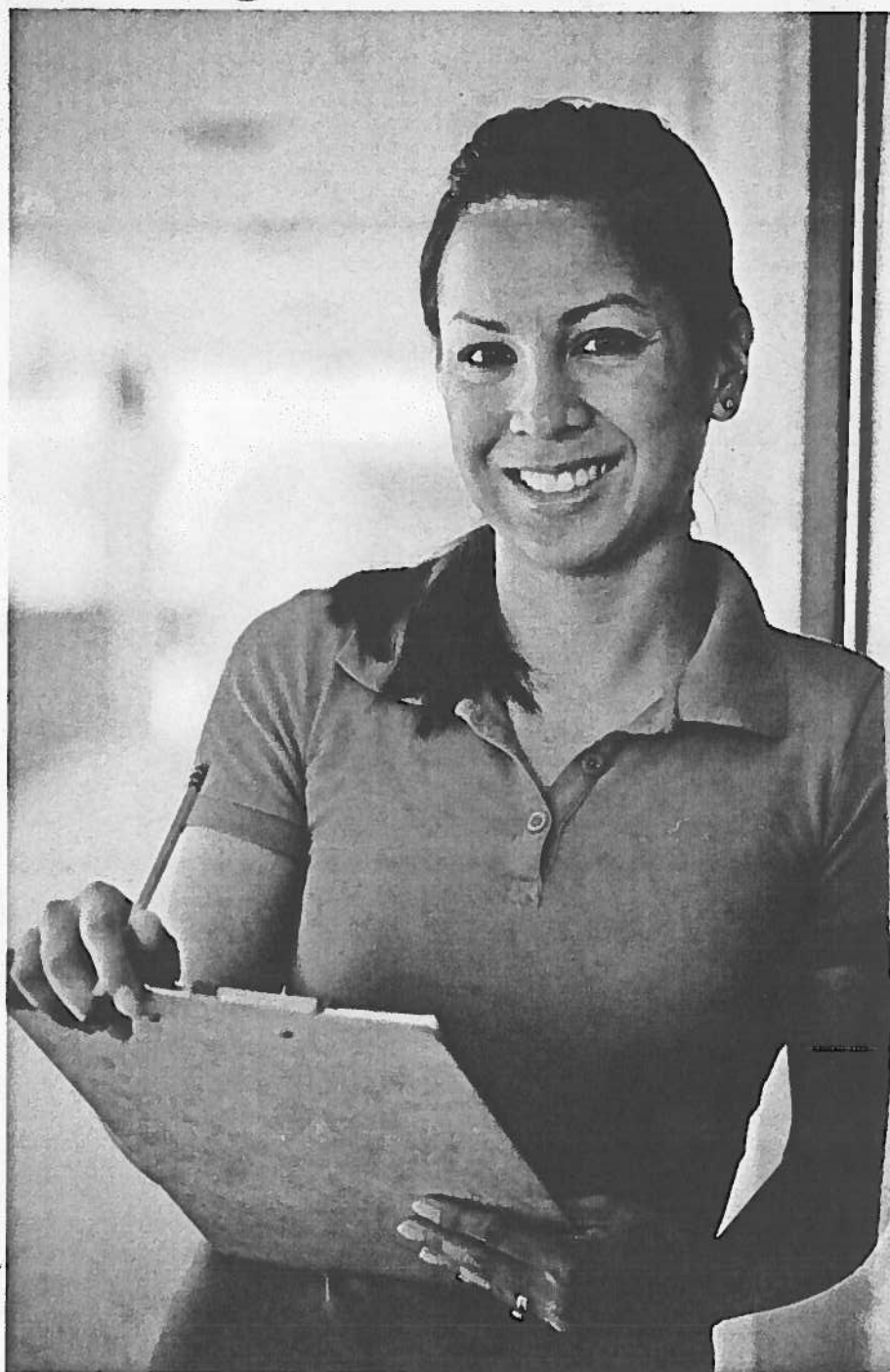


## Supervision in Physical Education Teacher Education Programs:

### *Making the Case for Paired Placements*

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The student-teaching experience is widely recognized as the most influential aspect of preservice teacher education programs (Rodgers & Jenkins, 2010; Wilson & Readence, 1993). However, this field experience and the way it is supervised are criticized for a variety of reasons. Concerns include the lack of cooperating teachers able to provide meaningful experiences and feedback for student teachers (Meade, 1991); the disparity in perceptions of effective teaching between cooperating teachers and the programs that prepare student teachers (Rikard, 1990); the large size of classes, especially physical education and music, in many schools; and the geographical distance between field sites (Rodgers & Jenkins, 2010).



In spite of these challenges, the value of school-based experiences in teacher education is "accepted almost on blind faith" (Johnson, 1994, p. 199). Guyton and McIntyre (1990) pointed out that little is known about the effectiveness of various models of delivering and supervising field experiences. Too often, field experiences, especially student teaching, are developed and implemented for convenience or tradition. Others point out that there is a growing need for experimentation with student-teaching configurations and for the generation and evaluation of new models to determine their effectiveness (Bullough et al., 2002).

This seems especially true in view of the growing complexity of today's schools. Increasingly, teaching is a collaborative rather than an isolated endeavor. This requires new understandings of what teaching is and what effective teachers do. Howey and Zimpher (1999) pointed out that it is vital to the improvement of teacher education that preservice programs prepare future teachers to collaborate effectively.

## The Paired Placement Model

One alternative model for student teaching that addresses this concern is the use of paired placements. In this model, two student teachers are assigned to a single cooperating teacher in a school setting. The student teachers, in essence, share the placement. In paired placement situations, university supervisors have observed student teachers who are more confident and are taking more risks by trying new instructional approaches compared with student teachers in solo placements (Smith, 2004). Bullough and colleagues (2002) observed that student teachers in paired placements filled a wider range of roles in the classroom, including more tutoring, group work, and interaction with individual students. See Table 1.

Paired student teachers preferred paired placements to solo situations (84%; King, 2006), were more positive about student teaching, and felt they were better and more realistically prepared for future teaching (Bullough et al., 2002; Heidorn, Jenkins, Harvey, & Mosier, 2011; Jenkins, Heidorn, & Weaver, 2010). Paired student teachers also invested in each other and in one another's success, thereby providing a greater kind and quality of support than was available to solo student teachers (Bullough et al., 2002). The feedback and support they provided often led to a type of bonding and collegiality that could establish new ideas about how teachers do their work and develop professionally (Wynn & Kromrey, 1999) and could lead to the transformation of teaching called for by Howey and Zimpher (1999).

## Organizational Patterns of the Paired Placement Model

When organizing the student-teaching internship in a physical education teacher education (PETE) program, faculty might consider different organizational structures that can develop within the student-teaching internship in a paired placement model. These include: 1) the student teachers alternating

classes (e.g., student teacher [ST] 1 teaches the first class of the day and ST 2 teaches the second class, etc.); 2) the student teachers alternating grade levels (e.g., ST 1 teaches first, third, and fifth grades; ST 2 teaches kindergarten, second, and fourth grades); 3) the student teachers alternating roles (e.g., ST 1 leads and ST 2 assists, and vice versa); and 4) the student teachers alternating content (e.g., ST 1 teaches content 1 [e.g., fitness] and ST 2 teaches content 2 [e.g., skill development]). In addition, PETE faculty might consider the many advantages of organizing student teachers into paired placements. See Table 2.

### *Advantages of the paired placement model*

*More support.* During the student-teaching internship, many students express concerns about isolation, feeling like they are on an island, and not having others with whom they can share common experiences throughout the internship, especially if students do not meet with their peers on a regular basis in formal or informal ways. As much as the student teachers have been prepared for effective teaching in K-12 schools, there may be social and/or emotional feelings that develop, particularly early in the semester. When students are organized in paired placements, they can share their problems and discuss concerns, thereby reducing the amount of stress and isolation often experienced in the student-teaching internship.

*More feedback.* With the paired placement model, not only do student teachers have the opportunity to receive instructional feedback from a cooperating teacher and university supervisor, but they can also receive feedback from the additional student teacher in the program. Even though this feedback may be mostly general and positive (as opposed to specific, evaluative, or corrective), there is still a greater opportunity to improve teaching methods based on multiple observations taking place. Essentially, two individuals (i.e., the cooperating teacher and the other student teacher) observe each teaching experience as opposed to just one.

*More time for individual instruction and remediation.* Many times, in a solo placement, cooperating teachers observe lessons taught by a student teacher but are unable to provide individual instruction or remediation because a new class of learners is marching into the gymnasium. When two student teachers are placed in one learning environment, the cooperating teacher has the opportunity to spend additional time with each student teacher, especially in programs where there is a limited amount of time between classes. In this model, the additional student teacher can begin instructing the new class, while the cooperating teacher and the student teacher who just taught can spend time reflecting on the previous lesson together. Furthermore, it is possible that the cooperating teacher and the other student teacher can discuss a lesson that is currently taking place, while highlighting strengths of the lesson and areas for improvement.

*Collaborative work and reflection.* When two student teachers from the same PETE program are paired together in one

**Table 1. Overview of a Literature Review of the Student-Teaching Internship**

**Challenges**

- There is often a lack of training for cooperating teachers and university supervisors.
- There are disparities between cooperating teachers and teacher preparation programs related to effective teaching.
- There are concerns about the high cost of and time required for effective supervision.

**The Future of Student Teaching**

- Prepare future teachers to collaborate effectively in today's complex schools.
- Experiment with various student-teaching models to determine effectiveness.

learning environment, they can often share resources, plan lessons/units of instruction together, and lean on each other's expertise in various content areas. This collaboration can enhance the quality of the experience for the student teachers, as well as the students in the K-12 physical education program.

*Learning by watching.* Most PETE programs provide pre-service teachers with multiple opportunities to observe and/or teach quality physical education lessons prior to the student-teaching internship (e.g., field experiences). Some programs include specific observational instruments that are used during the experiences. When implementing a paired placement model, the observational techniques learned in previous semesters can continue throughout the student-teaching internship for additional emphases on a variety of best practices (e.g., practice time, feedback statements, cues and demonstrations, and teacher movement).

*Management assistance.* Many physical education programs consist of classes with a large number of students. This often creates management difficulties or organizational dilemmas for both new and veteran teachers. When two student teachers are placed within the same program, however, several additional management techniques can be implemented. This often results in fewer management problems, smaller groups with more teachers, different arrangements and uses of equipment, and more individual attention and feedback provided to K-12 students.

*A variety of teaching styles.* Students in a K-12 physical education program can significantly benefit from a variety of teaching styles and learning experiences. As a bonus for a program with a cooperating teacher and only one student teacher, a paired placement model provides K-12 students with opportunities to learn content from a third teacher, thereby increasing the chances of enhancing the richness, depth, insight, or meaning derived from the learning experiences.

*A more realistic teaching situation.* Because many physical education programs include more than one full-time teacher, including paraprofessionals, using a paired placement model gives the student teachers an opportunity to learn and practice teaching in an environment in which they may be placed at some point in their career. The paired placement model essentially forces the student teachers to collaborate, communicate

effectively, and get along in a realistic teaching situation. If this is done well during the student-teaching internship, graduates of the program will be well on their way to effective collaboration in future settings.

Despite the many advantages, there are potential disadvantages, struggles, and/or problems that may develop throughout the internship in a paired placement model. These concerns might surface dependent on the strategic placement of student teachers within the model and/or the training/instruction of all participants in the model.

***Disadvantages of the paired placement model***

*Fewer teaching opportunities.* Perhaps the greatest concern among student teachers in a paired placement model is the reduction of teaching opportunities due to sharing the space and students with another student teacher. In many cases, student teachers in the model will teach fewer lessons, will deal with fewer management issues from which they can learn, and wish they had more opportunities to teach during their internship.

*Compromises in collaborative teaching.* In a paired placement model, the cooperating teacher may find difficulty compromising with two student teachers related to the curriculum, the teaching experiences, duties, and other opportunities. Because each student teacher is different, the cooperating teacher may need to significantly alter his or her approach to mentoring. In addition, teaching styles and strategies may differ among individuals, further increasing the methods of instruction and perhaps creating difficulties in determining which method will be used.

*Second teacher as a distraction.* Especially in elementary school programs, having an additional individual in the gymnasium may be a distraction to learners. However, this "disadvantage" is often removed once the students become acquainted with having more than one (or two) teachers in the learning space, as long as the additional student teacher is not acting in a way that is distracting.

*Perceived preferential treatment and relationship issues.* In complex social environments (i.e., schools), it is likely that some individuals will naturally become more closely acquainted with other certain individuals. If this occurs in a paired placement model, one student teacher may feel left out or suspect prefer-

Table 2. Overview of the Organizational Patterns of the Paired Placement Model

Potential Advantages	Potential Disadvantages
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• More support</li><li>• More feedback</li><li>• More time for individual instruction and remediation</li><li>• Collaborative work and reflection</li><li>• Learning by watching</li><li>• Management assistance</li><li>• A variety of teaching styles</li><li>• A more realistic teaching situation</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Fewer teaching opportunities</li><li>• Compromises in collaborative teaching</li><li>• Second teacher as a distraction</li><li>• Perceived preferential treatment and relationship issues</li><li>• Unequal workload among student teachers</li><li>• Insufficient time to help two student teachers</li></ul>

ential treatment in favor of the other student teacher. This could potentially result in a negative student-teaching experience for all three individuals (i.e., the cooperating teacher and both student teachers). Working closely with cooperating teachers and strategically pairing student teachers can alleviate some of these concerns, but there is no guarantee that all individuals within the model will remain free from relationship issues. Note that relationship issues may occur in any program, even with only one student teacher.

*Unequal workload among student teachers.* In some situations, it is possible that one student teacher in a paired placement model works more diligently or carries an additional burden because of a “weaker” student teacher in the pairing. This could result in some resentment, frustration, or feelings of an unequal workload if both student teachers do not carry the same weight. Strategic placement of student teachers in a paired placement model can often alleviate this concern.

*Insufficient time to help two student teachers.* Not all cooperating teachers have similar abilities in mentoring student teachers. Some may mention the difficulty of providing a sufficient amount of instructional feedback and “on-the-job” training to two student teachers. Many cooperating teachers in physical education wear numerous “hats” in the K–12 school environment. Mentoring more than one student teacher may pose challenges for which some cooperating teachers are not prepared. To clarify this point, Rodgers and Jenkins (2010) stated that “while cooperating teachers generally embrace the opportunity to work with preservice teachers, these teachers are frequently ill prepared for their role. They have unrealistic expectations and are reluctant to provide meaningful feedback to student teachers and evaluation for university supervisors” (p. 108).

## Significance and Conclusion

A review of data suggests that the original intent and interest of the paired placement model — to enable deeper learning for student teachers through cooperation and interaction with their peers in a student-teaching setting — can be accomplished through paired placements. It is likely that graduates of paired placement programs will work more collaboratively and

thoughtfully in their future roles and stimulate the transformation of teaching suggested by Howey and Zimpher (1999).

Questions may arise, however, about the potential for significantly affecting the way we prepare health and physical education professionals, specifically during student teaching. Patterns might begin to emerge that suggest a need for a more strategic placement of student teachers. Throughout K–12 education and even in university coursework, individual differences drive the educational approach used to ensure maximum success for all learners. Yet, traditionally with student teaching, we deliver the same supervision treatment to all preservice candidates. Situations in which there is an unequal workload or in which relationship problems may develop would suggest that student teachers should be placed or paired strategically. But do we want to place them to *avoid* complex situations that need to be negotiated, or should we place them to *encourage* such valuable professional experiences in a setting where it can be controlled and where we can mentor them through the negotiation process?

Similarly, with providing feedback, the high value and potential of peer feedback may contribute to the development of moderate or weak student teachers who need paired placements more than stronger student teachers do. Less promising student teachers might be better placed closer to campus to receive more frequent supervisory visits, perhaps even from multiple supervisors, with stronger student teachers in distant placements with fewer observation visits. These questions are further complicated by the objectives of the student-teaching internship. Are the objectives and goals the same for all student teachers? If all must demonstrate the same terminal performance (that is, to be certifiable), will that not require a longer student-teaching experience for some students than for others?

While some data suggest that paired placements can help a physical education program address some of the challenges associated with traditional student teacher supervision, other data raise additional questions that can significantly affect the way we prepare physical educators to effectively lead in today’s complex school and social settings.

Results of years of research data working with student teachers in physical education in a paired placement model have clearly demonstrated that paired student teacher place-


ments are an effective alternative to traditional solo placements (Heidorn et al., 2011). Of noteworthy importance, researchers have found that resources can be conserved and that context-specific structures will emerge, many of which can lead to more effective teaching and learning experiences (Heidorn, Jenkins, Mosier, & Harvey, 2012).

Based on the history of paired placements, it is recommended that faculty members in PETE programs contemplating a paired placement model follow these recommendations:

1. *Match students.* Spend time strategically organizing the paired placements, as opposed to making random selections. Place students according to strengths and abilities, personalities, and a variety of other factors.
2. *Consider class size when placing pairs.* Not every K–12 physical education program can or will benefit from having two student teachers simultaneously. Not all programs can provide meaningful experiences for two student teachers. Consider using a paired placement model only for K–12 programs in which the model makes sense.
3. *Work consistently with student teachers prior to the internship to better prepare them for the school environment in which they will be working.* Faculty members may need to provide additional training and instruction for students in a paired placement. This training might include a review or new instruction related to additional observational techniques, collaboration, and instructional methods (e.g., teaching, assisting, etc.).
4. *Work with student teachers on providing appropriate feedback to their peer for continued development as an effective teacher.* Many university students are not yet comfortable with providing instructional feedback to their peers. But the feedback opportunities can greatly enhance their teaching and, ultimately, student learning. Therefore, PETE faculty members can increase the success of the paired placement model by training student teachers in how to effectively provide feedback to their peer in a teaching situation.

Future work in supervision in PETE programs should consider paired placements as a model for effective supervision during the student-teaching internship.

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